

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Flags, Frogs, And Bears

Our story of Flags, Frogs and Bears, as given us by J. S. Coates of Carmel, the narrator, and a lifer in Folsom Prison by the name of Pecor who painted a series of panels for the mess hall at the prison, is continued today starting with the landing at Monterey of Capt. Hypolite de Bouchard in 1818.

The Spanish colony that had been established in Monterey and boasted of a presidio had established some permanency. It was a port of call for an increasing number of ships. Pecor chronicles and depicts the advent of one such visit. (As we already have recorded, his captions for the panels do not exactly match the beauty of the panels and the accuracy of his drawings of these historical events concerning the flags which have flown over California.)

Pecor's caption:

"The Monterey dons got a bad break one day when two boatloads of hoodlums out of Buenos Aires hit town. They set up a private flag, bumped town leaders, snatched women, and kicked in everything including Santa Barbara. After 30 days they took it on the lam; the dons yelled for cops."

These two privateers, one under command of Capt. Bouchard, an Argentinean, the other an Englishman, Peter Gorney, hove into Monterey Bay and demanded supplies. They sent in a landing party, opened fire on Monterey, and hoisted their privateer flag. After 60 days of travel up and down the coast, they finally took their flag and sailed away just ahead of a rescue party which was sent from Pueblo de Los Angeles.

"The Mexican Empire - 1822." Of this period Mr. Coates writes: "Things in general hummed along slowly in good California style for a few years with occasional news from Spain and Mexico. These two countries had been waging a war for about 11 years and Mexico finally won her Independence from Spain and established the Mexican Empire. News of this event in due course of time arrived at Monterey in 1822 and with great rejoicing and an elaborate ceremony the Mexican Empire flag replaced that of Spain which flew over the Presidio of Monterey. But the empire was short lived."

Pecor, the convict, shows a glimpse of this event and captions his painting at Folsom thusly:

"The Mexicans in the south, beefing over Spanish treatment, went to bat in a war that lasted 11 years. The Spaniards finally folded, and the winning Mexicans brought out the Mexican empire flag over the Presidio of Monterey. They held the blowout that topped any to date."

"The Mexican Republic (circa) 1824."

"The new Mexican government turned out to be a larry and after but two years they folded and pitched in with a new union of states. This called for a new flag and the Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos; which was raised at Monterey after the dons there got smart to the play." The above is the caption placed on the mural describing that episode, by the lifer artist at Folsom Prison.

There is a flag now in the Custom House in Monterey, differing somewhat from that which Pecor depicts in his painting - which is reputed to be the one of Mexico that was flying over the Presidio when Adm. John D. Sloat sailed into Monterey Bay in 1846 and claimed the land for the United States of America.

Mr. Coates reports on good authority that this Mexican flag was never hauled down officially and surrendered to Adm. Sloat but was taken down later after the landing of Sloat by a loyal Mexican citizen and it remained in his family for many years. At the time of the first Portola Fiesta in San Francisco in October 1909, some of the red cloth from this flag was cut in small pieces and given as souvenirs to a select few. A piece was given to the late Col. F. L. Knudsen and later presented to the Monterey History and Art Assn. by Mrs. Knudsen.

Another Mexican flag, given to the association by the late Jean Julliard, is framed and hangs over a south doorway in the Custom House. This flag is tricolor of olive green, white and red. On the center white panel is an eagle with semi-spread wings, with beak and eyes pointed to the right and in its beak a long green snake. The center panel of this flag is without a doubt the one that was cut up for souvenirs, for the center panel in the framed flag is a restored one.

To be continued.